



Tahoe National Forest

American Fire Burned Area Emergency Response Frequently Asked Questions

What is BAER?

BAER stands for Burned Area Emergency Response, a process designed to help field units develop plans to address wildfire-related emergency stabilization issues that pose immediate and significant threats to human life and property. A BAER team begins its assessment as soon as it is safe to do so and must complete its report quickly so stabilization plans can move forward.

What does a BAER assessment address?

The BAER team maps the area's burn severity; assesses soil characteristics and geologic hazards while identifying flood source areas; and surveys for sensitive habitat and heritage resources and the potential for noxious weed infestation.

What are some BAER principles?

BAER addresses an emergency caused or aggravated by wildfire. The recommended activities are to be minimal and temporary using cost-effective and proven methods.

What are BAER treatment preferences?

Ideally, natural recovery with no treatment is preferred but not always prudent when the damage is severe. An administrative closure to restrict use that may delay critical recovery is another treatment preference. When other measures are recommended, they are done with a suite of proven treatments, such as mulching, noxious weed monitoring, and road protection.

What are some of the values potentially at risk within the American Fire area?

Among the values potentially at risk are the following:

- American River Pump Station
- Historic mining sites
- Horseshoe Bar Preserve
- Native plant loss to noxious and invasive weeds
- Rainbow trout habitat
- Soil productivity
- Transportation systems
- Western States Trail

Describe what soil burn severity levels mean in regards to what might happen in these areas in the future.

High - Mostly ash and carbon remain from pre-fire organic substrate material. Sites normally exhibit over 50 percent cover of newly exposed mineral soil or rock fragments. Herbaceous plants and shrubs are over 90 percent charred or consumed above ground. Such effects are generally evident for several



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years after a fire, with herbaceous plants and shrubs taking a few growing seasons to recover. Overstory trees are typically strongly affected, with over 75 percent mortality expected. Forest development in these areas takes many decades.

Moderate - Moderate fire intensity may not sterilize soil or remove nearby seed sources to as large an extent as when high intensity burning occurs. Numerous potential combinations of distinctly low and high effects may occur to yield a moderate classification overall for these sites.

Low - Low vegetation density or cover may be greatly altered temporarily. But plants present before the fire generally are still viable and recover quickly within a year or two with little change in species composition. Approximately 25 percent of larger trees in these areas will die.

Unburned – Fire effects are slight if any; these areas recover quickly after a fire.

What results did the American Fire burn severity map show?

The burn severity map showed the following acreages and percentages in each of four burn severity categories:

- High: 3,759 acres (14 percent)
- Moderate: 11,689 acres (43 percent)
- Low: 10,482 acres (38 percent)
- Unburned: 1,510 acres (6 percent)

What specific projects will the American Fire BAER funding support?

Just over \$200,000 will be used to stabilize roads and trails with such activities as cleaning culverts and roadside ditches; installing culverts and rolling dips; and grading roads. Nearly \$200,000 will be spent on mulching and mastication activities on high-priority soils to minimize erosion and protect water quality. In the interest of safety, approximately \$33,000 will support hazard-tree removal and signage, and over \$18,000 will help with noxious weed detection and rapid response.

What situations can limit viable treatment options?

High geologic instability such as existing high erosion, high landslide potential, high surface rock cover, sparse natural vegetation, and steep slopes can limit viable treatment options. Climate can also be a factor.